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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a postmodern feminist conceptual framework for policy development within educational institutions. It first outlines major concepts of postmodern feminism, after which it begins to focus specifically on postmodern feminism and education. The paper contends that a goal of all educators should be to provide an educational environment where gender inequity is not tolerated. All provinces and states should require their educational institutions to develop policies that will help to create an environment free from all forms of discrimination. Educators have a legal and ethical responsibility to prevent gender inequity in the educational environment. Ultimately, the paper details educational policy development utilizing work on the role of epistemology and expertise in policymaking. The first appendix outlines potential policy initiatives that would promote more gender equitable practices within schools, including maternity and family leave, recruitment and hiring, part-time teachers, and affirmative action programs. A second appendix lists 18 questions to ask about any policy proposed to create gender equity. (Contains 26 references.) (MLF)

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Postmodern Feminism and Educational Policy Development

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1

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Biographical Note

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Abstract

This paper presents a postmodern feminist conceptual framework for policy development within educational institutions. It first outlines major concepts of postmodern feminism as distinguished by Luke and Gore (1992), after which it begins to focus specifically on postmodern feminism and education. Ultimately, the paper details educational policy development utilizing Tong's (1986) work on the role of epistemology and expertise in policymaking.

Postmodern Feminism and Educational Policy Development

At a time when efforts are being made to eradicate discrimination between the sexes in the search for equality and justice, the differences of the sexes are being rediscovered in the social sciences. Gilligan (1994) states that this discovery occurs at a time when theories formerly considered to be sexually neutral in their objectivity are found instead to reflect a consistent masculine bias. The difficulty with many current theories is that they remain laden with masculinist assumptions about hierarchies and justifications for neglecting contradictions and unknowability. Consequently, the presumed neutrality of science is toppled with the realization that categories of knowledge are themselves human constructions, and "truth" becomes relative to the knowledge creator. In extension, the policies created relative to these categories of knowledge are also human constructions laden with masculinist assumptions:

> our existing politics, policies, programs, research funding, and policy studies have ignored or marginalized the feminist critique....Whether the issue is teen pregnancy, or sexual harassment in schools or the under-utilization of women's leadership in schools,–all documented problems–little funding goes to research or programs putting women at the center of these issues. (Marshall, 1998, p. 2)

The purpose of this paper is to present a postmodern feminist conceptual framework for policy development within educational institutions. It first outlines major concepts of postmodern feminism as distinguished by Luke and Gore (1992), after which it begins to focus specifically on postmodern feminism and education. Ultimately, the paper details educational policy development utilizing Tong's (1986) work on the role of epistemology and expertise in policymaking.

Postmodern Feminism

Conceptions of life represent attempts to order and make coherent the unfolding experiences, perceptions and realities of everyday life. But the understanding of the truth of such conceptions depends in part on the position of the observer, which may be of a different sort if the observer is a woman. Additionally, each woman, as each individual, conceives of truth differently. Hence the potential for the development of a postmodern feminist perspective which accommodates contextuality and individualized perceptions of "truth.".

An integration of the inherent characteristics of postmoderism and feminist thought "engenders" a unique way of knowing the world. A postmodern feminist epistemology accepts that knowledge is always provisional, open-ended and relational. Language, master narratives and ways of knowing are located in historical and cultural contexts. The contextual character of all knowledge and knowing suggests that there can be no finite and unitary truths; inherent to this framework is the centrality of subjectivity and context. Various postmodern feminisms maintain an interest in signification, in power/knowledge relationships, in damage done by master-narratives, and in the way institutional structures are controlled. The postmodern feminist pedagogy therefore demands a critical examination of underlying assumptions. This pedagogy demands "confrontations with discontinuities, particularities, and the narratives that embody actual life stories...renewed attentiveness to the construction of knowledge and the life of meaning...relational, practice-centered, contextualized, and open-ended" (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. x).

Held's (1997) view that gender, even more than socio-economic class, provides a perspective of reality, both social and physical, that dominant perspectives do not reveal. She believes that feminism requires "a distinctively feminist reconstruction of reality, [that is] conceptualized [from

a] feminist standpoint"(p. 886). Women must be critical of the standard views promoted within society, as they may be masked by masculinist notions. In order to avoid the oppression of the past, the future must be structured in such a way as to be fair to women. To that end they call for "new conceptualizations of power and empowerment, and for new recommendations concerning the kinds of relations which ought to prevail between human beings" (p. 882). If traditional views can be reconceptualized as being "masculine" views, traditional epistemologies will be transformed. Feminists must therefore insist that knowledge include the experiences and interests of women as of equal importance with those of men.

This position suggests that we cannot claim single-strategy pedagogies of empowerment, emancipation, and liberation (Luke & Gore, 1992). Postmodern feminism acknowledges its own position in discourse and in history, and remains critical of its own complicity in writing gender. However, by locating educational work in particular sites and with attention to specific practices, the possibilities for genuinely reshaping relations in pedagogy may be actualized.

Postmodern Feminism and Education

The following sections build upon the conceptual framework of postmodern feminism presented in this paper. The sections attempt to develop a link between postmodern feminist thought and education. Discussion begins with the claim that the invisibility of women in educational philosophy devalues women in education and in policy. Since philosophy drives practice, the paper elaborates upon some of the deficiencies that exist within the current educational system, and advocates a gender-sensitive approach to policy development.

The invisible women - implications for education.

According to Martin (1994), disciplines fall short of the ideal epistemological equality, that

is, quality in representation and treatment of women in academic knowledge itself, for example, in scientific theories, historical narratives, and literary interpretations. Disciplines exclude women from their subject matter; they distort the female according to the male image of her, and they deny the feminine by forcing women, and men, into a masculine mold (Martin, 1994). Essentially, contemporary philosophy of education makes women and their activities and experiences invisible. Martin (1994, p. 115) suggests two major consequences of this phenomenon. Firstly, when the experience of women is neither reflected nor interpreted in the texts and anthologies of the history of educational philosophy: women are given no opportunity to understand and evaluate the range of ideals that the great thinkers of the past have held for them; students of both sexes are denied contact with the great female minds of the past and are denied the knowledge that women have ever thought seriously and systematically about education; and the message that women are not capable of significant philosophical reflection is transmitted. The second consequence is that, by placing women outside the educational realm or else making them invisible within it, the contemporary philosophy of education also contribute to the devaluation of women. Convictions that only the narrow sense of education is worthy of philosophical inquiry keeps us from perceiving the teaching that takes place in childrearing as a serious, significant undertaking; it makes women's traditional activities appear trivial.

Philosophy of education facilitates patriarchal policy; for in making females invisible, philosophy of education helps maintain the inequality of the sexes. It reinforces the impression that girls and women are not important contributors to education and that the activities they have traditionally performed are not worthwhile. Furthermore, "philosophy's traditional questions of value, virtue, veracity and validity cannot be asked about the education of females because females

are unseen in the educational realm. Thus enlightenment is denied to policies that directly affect girls and women" (Martin, 1994, p. 115). According to Marshall (1998), these policy omissions affect the educational arena:

> The wave-making education reform of the 80's commanded national and state attention to improve schools' performance....The policy culture did not countenance interventions to alter the patterns in schooling that reproduce inequitable gender relations. Nor did the policy culture countenance interventions that reconceptualized gender constructions, definitions of family life, and revalued women's work. Gender and power relations in the workplace and personal relationships–the deeper assumptions undergirding gender issues–were not on the policy agenda. (pp. 2-3)

Many women have provided theoretical and pedagogical support to philosophical thought and social structure. Their own discoveries and advances have repeatedly been overlooked by male-dominated cultures. As long as there is no epistemological equality for women in philosophy of education, that discipline will serve patriarchal policy, albeit unintentionally, since male norms become the basis of policy development. Thus, traditional male activities and cultural values (independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war, and death) are built into the educational system while activities traditionally assigned to females (interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace and life) are ignored.

Education and postmodern feminism.

The opportunities for certain women hide the discrimination that continues in many private

and public realms and also masks the unevenness of women's advances. From an analysis of the work completed by Stone (1994), Luke and Gore (1992) and Kenway and Modra (1992), four recurrent themes in feminist writing on education are found. Firstly, discussions of gender and of research on gender differences are incomplete without recognition of the impact of other important factors, such as social class, ethnicity and race. Secondly, the collective struggles of women to be heard and taken seriously in matters of theory, policy and practice in education must be emphasized. Thirdly, there exists the need for equity to counteract the continuing experiences of inequity faced by women in education. Finally, there exists a need to focus on alternative ways of framing questions, investigating problems, and interpreting data.

Those concerned with gender and schooling have a difficult educational project. The reason may be that "engaging in theoretical debate with the 'converted' is an occasional luxury, subsumed within the wider task of constructing a discourse with sufficient ideological power to change the practice of teachers and policy-makers - most of whom are not feminists" (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p. 160).

Postmodernism's influence on feminine thought advances the need to promote feminine ideology while at the same time remaining critical of its potential to define particular recipes for emancipation. Postmodern feminist ideology must be as critical of its own agendas for emancipation as it is critical of the current state of affairs in education.

Gender-sensitivity.

What is required, then, is a gender-sensitive philosophy of education. However, there exists the transitional problem of moving from a gender-biased education in a sexist culture to an unbiased education that will continue for some time to be influenced by the wider culture. The most effective

way to deal with gender bias is to adopt a gender-sensitive perspective. According to Houston (1994), gender-sensitivity is fundamentally "a perspective that encourages a critical and constant review of the meaning and evaluation attached to gender. In this gender-sensitivity offers hope for the elimination of all types of gender bias than does a gender-free strategy" (p. 123). Gender-sensitivity is committed to sex equality and equal educational opportunity, recognizing that more attention to gender is necessary. Houston (1994) emphasizes this point with the following comment:

> we are in a position in which women are beginning to create a study of themselves by themselves. There is now the opportunity for us to articulate systematically, theorize about, and evaluate our own experience. We need this opportunity especially to investigate what is or might be our uniquely female experience in order better to understand the human condition. We will not achieve the understanding if we ignore or try to obliterate gender differences, or attend only to those experiences that the genders share in common, without first being sure that we have accurate information about differences and a proper evaluation of them. (p. 129)

A gender-sensitive perspective recommends that educators pay attention to gender when it can prevent sex bias or further sex equality. This perspective requires careful monitoring of gender interactions and urges direct intervention when necessary to equalize opportunities and to consider alternative strategies for eliminating bias. Houston (1994) emphasizes a postmodern feminist approach, based on the importance of context and sense-making:

> a gender-sensitive strategy allows one to recognize that at different times and in different circumstances one might be required to adopt opposing policies to eliminate gender bias....it is a perspective that constantly reminds us to question the ways in which students and

> teachers make sense of patterns of discrimination and themselves determine which particular action to take to eliminate bias. This is an important feature to bear in mind. It is the chief virtue of this perspective, for new, unsuspected types of gender bias will continue to emerge. (p. 131)

A gender-sensitive strategy is on-going, and leaves open educational questions for continuing further examination. Stromquist (1995) states that "in the field of education, gender-sensitive knowledge can be affected substantially through the presence of feminist teachers, the development of gender-sensitive materials (and policies), and the creation of nonformal education programs for adult women, all of which can materialize in the absence of laws" (p. 423). Perhaps one of the best features of the gender-sensitivity strategy is its ability to be self-correcting. Houston (1994) illustrates this principle in the following way:

> it is a view that can acknowledge that gender is a set of relations between the sexes, a process that is constantly organizing and reorganizing our social life. It can recognize the dynamic nature of the gender system, one that exerts pressures, produces reactions, and generates changes. Thus it is a perspective...that maintains a constant vigilance and reckoning on the significance gender requires in particular contexts. Only is we adopt a perspective of this sort will we be able to catch our own errors, alter policies and practices that no longer work, and introduce new policies for new circumstances. It is in this sense that a gender-sensitive perspective can be a self-correcting methodology for realizing the elusive ideal of sex equality. (p. 131)

Gender-sensitivity encourages a critical and constant review of the meaning and evaluation attached to gender, the sense-making critical reflection of postmodern feminism. This strategy

encourages women to evaluate their own sense-making and identity in reality. Gender-sensitivity celebrates diversity and contextuality in gender relations and encourages multiple perspectives on strategies for eliminating bias. Gender-sensitivity leaves open the possibility for alternative perspectives, and questions the validity of current ways of knowing and learning. Finally, gender-sensitivity is an ongoing process without closure, advocating the importance of relationships and change while building in an element of accountability and stressing the importance of self-correction as the strategy unfolds.

Policy Development

A goal of all educators should be to provide an educational environment where gender inequity is not tolerated. This requires more than a legal precedent. All provinces/states should require their educational institutions to develop policies that will help to create an environment free from all forms of discrimination. Educators have a legal and ethical responsibility to prevent gender inequity in the educational environment. Although there are no simple solutions, by collaboratively and aggressively confronting gender inequity, educators can formulate and implement effective gender equitable policies.

The social policy and practice issues of critical importance to women are numerous and complex. To assist policymakers and practitioners in this area most effectively, five principles for analysis and action are proposed which have been adapted from Hagen's and Davis' (1992) work on feminism and social policies. The first concerns differential impact and assumptions. All educational problems, policies, programs and practice models must be analyzed in terms of how they differentially affect women and men, and should be examined for their underlying assumptions about women and men in society. The second principle of analysis and action is the principle of

incrementation. This may enhance the likelihood that policymakers will accept changes that are supportive of women, and include building change into existing programs and policies, and incorporating feminist principles into practice models. The third principle is congruence with societal and family values. Policy analysts highlight the importance of policy initiatives fitting into existing societal values (Prigmore & Atherton, 1986). Being congruent with societal values, however, poses some difficulty when attempting to address, and redress, women's issues because many problems confronting women are directly linked to prevailing societal values. The fourth principle, building coalitions, suggests that emphasis must be given to building coalitions around shared interests and the promotion of widespread use of groups in which woman are encouraged to identify and to act. The final principle, change at the local level, suggests that action should occur at the local as well as the national level. Practical examples of policy initiatives which incorporate these principles are outlined in Appendix A.

As postmodern feminism posits, there exists no one grand solution to rectify all situations. All stakeholders within education play a huge role in developing alternatives. Diversity is a strength. If restructuring needs to happen, or is happening, education policymakers need to keep that in mind. What follows is a description of the types of elements and/or processes that postmodern feminist policymakers are likely to incorporate into policy development, based upon Tong's work on policy analysis.

Process versus product.

Tong (1986) believes that we must have a detachment between the macro and micro levels of policy making but maintain some links between them to ensure that the intent of policy matches its outcomes. Individuals involved in policymaking may have different individual politics, but it is

the discourse and discussion between the policymakers that brings about best policy. Therefore, content is not the only consideration in policy-making; process is also important. This idea is analogous to that of feminist theory which advances that historically, practices and processes traditionally associated with the "masculine" have bequeathed society "products" that have been oppressive to women. Therefore, the processes by which feminist goals and policies are sought and developed should be evaluated by feminist standards, along with the goals themselves. Feminists insist that policymakers be open to differing interpretations of the lived experiences of women (Held, 1993).

Feminists argue that gender must be attended to as a central factor in organizing society. Feminist recommendations for the future typically include those which either de-emphasize the role of gender in the promotion of democratic ideals, or in fact grant priority to feminist concerns and traditionally "feminine" values. For instance, process proceedings such as collective and collaborative efforts, as well as less possessive, less aggressive and mutually supportive styles for working based upon a sense of the importance of relationships would likely increase in feminist policymaking efforts (Held, 1989).

Fact versus value.

Tong (1986) encourages policy analysts to acknowledge that facts are inseparable from values; therefore, the policy world is populated by value-laden facts. Epistemological problems are likely to confront the policy expert. Generally, these problems have to do with the relation between either fact and value or knowledge and belief. Human interests determine what counts as a relevant fact. Hence, in policy making, common sense, ethical insight, and dialogue/discourse between stakeholders are advised.

Postmodern feminists argue this very same point, but elaborate upon it by submitting that what has constituted the"facts" of policy-making situations throughout history has been laden with masculinist values which have inevitably served to decrease opportunities for women: "once we see that policy systems, schools and knowledge are the work benches for power tools, our social science pretenses of value neutrality are abandoned" (Marshall, p. 5). Consequently, these theorists argue for policy development based upon "facts" underpinned by "feminine" values as well as those typically considered to be "masculine" values. For instance, Held (1995) offers that a feminist society would view interdependence and relationships as being of high value, "embedded in a wider network of social relations characterized by social caring and trust" (p. 170). This society would be expected to put the care and development of each unique child at the center of its concerns; it would seek to build institutions and practices beneficial for children. As a result, social programming would provide for policies developed around family, arrangements for child care, the education and health of children, maternal health care, paternal leave, early education, flexible work schedules and awareness of sexual victimization. Tong (1997) includes in this list access to birth control, abortion, adequate means to support a family; abolishing "the compulsory heterosexuality and mandatory motherhood that have characterized all male-dominated societies" and restructuring the wage labor force. Essentially, women and men become equal participants in a workforce responsive to the needs of parents. In addition, concerns for future children may include the awareness of promoting harmonious relationships between human beings and the environment.

Interpretive (post-positivist) policy science versus positivistic policy science.

Tong (1986) argues for the use of interpretive policy science which looks at the kinds of facts that are selected and how they are to be interpreted utilizing humanistic disciplines such as

historical narrative, ethical argument, literary exegesis, and jurisprudential reasoning. Interpretive policy analysts ascertain whether these standards promise more guidance to the policy sciences than do the norms of the natural and social sciences. The analyst explains the meaning of a given activity, relationship, or artifact within a web of inter-related activities, relationships and artifacts, and always questions, "Why?" These policy-makers utilize praxis, practical reason, which incorporates ethical and political reflection intent on doing good. To this end, Tong (1986) advocates "human agents as self-determining subjects and a form of government that relies upon informed participation of those agents for the achievement of mutually agreed-upon social objectives and the maintenance not of mere social order but of true human community" (pp. 35-36).

Tong believes that those policymakers who view themselves as "technicians" set themselves up against the "objects" they study. Instead, she argues for praxis which includes common sense, ethical insight, and collaboration and communication between ordinary citizens and decision-makers before policy formulation. The challenge for postmodern feminists is to constantly be aware of their emancipatory ideology, so that they do not set themselves against the "objects" they propose to help, in the respect that they may create policies that promote their feminist agenda without fully considering the wishes of all constituents.

Ethics in policymaking.

Policy makers need to identify and articulate the ways in which their epistemologies, ethics, and politics intersect when forging a policy that serves the public's best interest. For, "while it is true to say that our politics and ethics affect our epistemology, it is equally true to say that our epistemology...affects our politics and yes, our ethics" (Tong, 1986, p. 36).

Held (1996) believes that moral theories and ethical considerations must be transformative

and contextual because "we are trying to recommend and to justify how we ought to act in the world and what attitudes and characteristics we ought to cultivate"(pp. 169-170). According to Held (1995), moral inquiry into the nature of interactions within the family, as well as for the state, law, politics, and interactions among strangers should be transformed, and their traditional moral significance should be reduced. She further explains this statement by suggesting that a feminist ethic will of course include principles of justice and equality when settling disputes, but that this ethic will not attempt to generalize principles and approaches to all other domains and to all cases. This importance given to contextuality is paramount to postmodern feminist policymaking.

Ethics of care versus ethics of power.

There exists two specifically feminist approaches to ethics. The first is considered to be an ethics of care (often labeled "feminine" ethics) and the second is termed an ethics of power (often labeled "feminist" ethics). Whereas a care focused feminine approach to ethics emphasizes values that have been culturally associated with women (e.g. nurturance, care, compassion), a power-focused feminist approach to ethics emphasizes the need to eliminate those social, economic, political, and cultural systems and structures that maintain patriarchal domination and work against the establishment of a gender equitous world. Although there are real differences between care focused and power focused feminist approaches to ethics, Tong (1997) argues that they uniformly demand that nonfeminist approaches to ethics contain the following elements:(a) attend to women's moral interests and issues as much as to men's; (b) treat both women and men as full moral agents; (c) affirm the cultural values that have been associated with women (interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace and life) as strongly as the cultural values that have been associated with men (independence,

autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war, and death); and (d) value women's moral experiences and modes of moral reasoning as much as men's.

Jagger (1992) distinguishes a feminist approach to ethics as seeking:(a) to articulate moral critiques of actions and practices that perpetuate women's subordination; (b) to prescribe morally justifiable ways of resisting such actions and practices, and; (c) to envision morally desirable alternatives that will promote women's emancipation. Essentially, feminist approaches to ethics attempt to show the importance of women's perspective and experience.

Feminist critics of feminine approaches to ethics often worry that the ethics of care/caring is an ethics for oppressed or otherwise vulnerable people, since, in their view, oppressed people often cater to the needs and desires of their oppressors in order to survive, and that "caring is subject to the same excesses and defects as justice" (Tong, 1993, p. 222).

Alternatively, feminist approaches to ethics are subject to the criticism that they are "female biased." Traditional ethicists have insisted that ethics applies equally well to both sexes, and that it would be misguided to construct an ethics that focuses on a specific group of people. According to Tong (1993), feminist approaches to ethics "try to fight oppression by making the powerful accountable for ignoring the oppressed"(p. 229) which has implications for the epistemology and ethics of feminist theory:

> Only those who have been the victims of domination and subordination can have the moral vision to create an ethics that transcends such abuse. I realize that the Tradition is threatened by a moral claim with an experiential prerequisite. Yet should it be? Even Aristotle said that ethical decisions rest in perception-- in perceiving, in seeing through one's experiences

to the moral truth behind appearances. (Tong, 1993, p. 228)

The advantage of postmodern feminism is that it encourages support for multiple perspectives and ways of viewing the world, as well as accountability for actions taken by those traditionally in positions of authority who have, overtly or inadvertently, oppressed others or suppressed their voices.

If one accepts this statement, the next question becomes, "Whose ethical decisions and whose experiences does one accept?" For feminists, the "experts" are women who recognize their oppressed position within society. However, Schaub (1995) succinctly details what is perhaps the most serious flaw of feminist theory: the growing gap between "first wave" or "equity" feminism which "demanded and won fundamental and political rights for women and opened up educational and economic opportunity," and "second wave feminism" which has "abandoned universalism for gynocentrism and traded enfranchisement for seemingly permanent victim status. Solidarity with women has come to mean hostility to men" (p. 100). There exists a gender war between males and females. Postmodern feminism argues that "experts" will be found of both genders, each of which will have contributions to make by virtue of their differing experiences. In addition, postmodern feminists appreciate the differences among experts within the same gender, and acknowledge the fact that individuality and contextuality, as well as gender, play a large role in the generation of the assumptions and beliefs of the "expert."

Experts.

The notion of expertise, can have a negative impact upon policy development. Tong (1991) examines the epistemology and ethics of consensus, focusing on the ways in which decision-makers use/misuse ethical expertise. Tong believes that often "experts" represent specific interest groups; if

decision-makers are to accept the advice of these experts, the experts must have more knowledge than the decision makers themselves. This corresponds to the conception that because women have been oppressed they are better knowers and therefore have special insights into the nature of reality. Here lies a caution for postmodern feminists, since even "expert" women run into the danger of elitism by virtue of promoting an empowerment agenda. Postmodern feminists must remain constantly aware that the feminine "voice" is in actual fact feminine "voices," and that masculine voices are just as legitimate.

Tong asserts that there are two primary reasons why decision-makers have come to accept the authority of expert advice. The first has to do with the fact that decision makers find difficult to trust themselves as authorities due to the divergent interpretations and increasing knowledge bases that exist within the world. Secondly, because decision makers mistrust themselves, they are more easily swayed by those who they presume to know more and who are able to speak authoritatively.

Tong (1986) also considers whether or not experts' authority is merely epistemological or whether it is also ethical. Ultimately, Tong (1986) advocates that decision makers should accept the advice of experts only if it accommodates their own reasoned moral point of view, since "second-hand ethics is no substitute for first-hand ethics in a community of equally autonomous moral agents" (p. 415). She worries over the tendency to use a group's consensus as a substitute for an individual's own moral deliberations and perceptions.

Tong (1986) believes that experts' authority consists both in their knowledge concerning specific matters of fact and/or value, as well as in their ability to achieve 'consensus' about what is true/false or right/wrong. However, she feels that the simple fact that "experts" are able to come to some sort of consensus does not necessarily transform them into a group of moral authorities: "the

more pluralistic our world becomes, the more we must rely on our moral selves to mediate the differences that threaten to tear us apart" (Tong, 1986, p. 92). The danger in the use of experts occurs when experts' findings begin to be invoked as authoritative norms, since this does not encourage the belief in the validity in multiple voice, multiple perspective, and multiple ways of viewing the world. Hence, postmodern feminists' transformation of society works vigilantly against simply replacing one value-based method of organizing society for another.

Tong (1986) believes that policy analyzing and advising will not be as responsive as it should be unless it is bolstered by open structures and unless policy experts reconceive their role and their obligations, realizing that their ultimate client is the people and that their obligation to the people is threefold:

> to bring to public attention government policies or practices that they believe may threaten the public health and welfare, to speak out when they believe that public debate is being needlessly hampered by the misrepresentation or suppression of information, and to share their information with as many citizens as they practically can when public debate is not as well informed as it could be. (pp. 133-134)

In essence, knowledge should be disseminated to as many citizens as possible, for "any other policy impedes personal autonomy as well as social progress, for without knowledge, neither individuals nor communities develop" (Tong, 1986, p. 134).

Tong (1986) explains that experts should be utilized in a consultative nature for educative and policy making roles. Ultimately, their role is one of informing, not standard setting. Consequently, an atmosphere of reciprocated trust and knowledge sharing must be created between the expert and the decision maker in order to facilitate communication, to alleviate and to learn

from mistakes, and to regard recommendations as reference tools for individualized moral decision making. Basically, Tong advocates that experts utilize an ethics of persuasion.

Ethics of persuasion.

Tong (1986) recommends that "experts" be particularly careful to practice an ethics of persuasion. Their role is not to force their group consensus upon decision-makers' individual moral perceptions and deliberations; rather, it is to help decision makers come to their own conclusion about what they ought to do: "although we may attempt to convince some people to change their behavior, we may never force them to do so, as we will disempower them, depriving them of their sense of autonomy" (Tong, 1991, p. 422)

Critics of this idea urge that if we must err between not being persuasive enough and being too persuasive, we should err in the direction of not being persuasive enough so that we do not limit personal autonomy and action. On the other hand, neither do these critics advocate the development of "individual isolationists who refuse to talk to each other for fear of having [their] minds changed" (Tong, 1991, p. 423)

Tong (1991) details what she believes are three practical ways of developing an ethics of persuasion: (a) disseminate recommendations in local forums as well as in national press conferences so that practitioners have the opportunity to think through their results with experts; (b) invite those who have sought expert recommendations to listen to their deliberations, and; (c) refrain from crossing the line between persuading and compelling. With these thoughts in mind, the final decision about what to do in any given situation must rest, then, with those directly affected by the policy, and not with those considered to be experts:

In a democratic, pluralistic society, ethics progresses by means of convention and by means

> of a mutual search for the human good. To exclude the citizenry from policy discussions is not only to subvert the democratic process, but to erode moral dialogue. Thus, whatever else policy experts may do, they should devise mechanisms that will enhance citizen participation. (Tong, 1986, p. 59)

Tong (1986) urges all citizens to play a role in the policy process by virtue of our obligations to each other in the democratic process as a moral citizenry: "By thinking and speaking, by deciding and acting, we reaffirm that we are morally responsible persons, who have the capacity to direct the way the world goes" (pp. 133-134).

Implications of Postmodern Feminism for Educational Policy Making

Perhaps the first implication of postmodern feminism for policy making is that the content of current educational policies would have to be examined and critiqued to determine whether they promote and/or are underpinned by masculinist notions of gender. Policy makers would be made aware of the structural and personal inequities between women and men that have been reproduced and perpetuated within policy. They would then utilize recommendations from postmodern feminist theorists concerning the kinds of relations which ought to prevail between human beings to address inequitable policies. Finally, the experiences and interests of women would be acknowledged to be of equal importance to those of men, and would be incorporated into policy development.

The processes by which feminist goals and policies in education are sought and developed would be evaluated by feminist standards, along with the goals themselves. Since gender is considered a central factor in organizing society, policy recommendations for the future would include those which either de-emphasize, or in fact grant priority to, feminist concerns and traditionally "feminine" values as well as those traditionally labeled masculine values. For instance,

one could suggest that the importance of process may translate into policies that encourage collaborative staff initiatives, staff and community school effectiveness efforts, and the philosophy that children come first.

Staff would benefit from policies concerned with family, arrangements for child care, the education and health of children, maternal health care, paternal leave, early education, flexible work schedules and awareness of sexual victimization as their personal circumstances warrant. However, administration would also need to be provided with support structures and resources within the school division in order to administer the policies. These may include financial or personnel resources, curricular or programming innovations and technology, and social services support. Some of the mentioned policy possibilities are more politically volatile than others, and would impact upon community relationships and ideals. Others not only provide for potential economic spin-offs within the community, but also promote the importance of living harmoniously in the rural environment, where relationships with the physical environment are often of great importance.

Postmodern feminist theorists argue for the necessity of personal experience, ethical behavior and collaborative decision-making. However, the emancipatory agenda of the feminist strand of thought runs the risk of developing policies that sacrifice individual desires to the promotion of a political agenda which is as much value-based, and perhaps as much gender-biased, as current policy making theories. Instead, an ethics of persuasion must be practiced, so that decision making in policy development remains in the control of those who have to deal with the repercussions of the policy. Inclusivity of multiple voice, multiple perspective, and multiple ways of viewing the world is encouraged in policy-making efforts.

Policies developed according to the premises of postmodern feminist theory have to be

flexible. This is due to the fact that the feminist ethic around which policies would be based, although premised upon principles of justice and equality, is not to be generalized, but is to be applied to the circumstances of a particular context. Their ability to help organize and give concrete direction to the educational organization is premised on their flexibility and contextuality.

The application of postmodern feminist theory should promote an atmosphere of reciprocal trust, knowledge sharing, open structures, consultation and good communication for morally responsible policy making. This is due to the fact that postmodern feminist thought encourages the voicing of multiple perspectives and accountability for past actions. Policies based upon multiple stakeholder input reflect decisions that are morally acceptable within the entire community, and "experts" of both genders are sought for their contributions to good practice. Finally, questions to ask about any policy proposed to create gender equity can be found in Appendix B.

Conclusion

The unequal treatment of women is structural and is embedded within the system. And unless one transforms the system, inequalities will persist. In the final analysis, the most important issue concerning change in the social structure of society is the change in attitude to that of a postmodern perspective that appreciates and systematically upholds the value of multiple voices and perspectives, and respects diversity. Weis and Fine (1993) sum up the need to analyze current policy in order to address inequity issues that exist due to the silencing of marginalized voices:

> It is our shared sense that public schools, as democratic public spheres, have an obligation to work with all students, teachers and parents, to listen and understand, and open up the structured silences imposed on those non-privileged. Those pushed to the margins are struggling for voice at the same time as those with privilege are mounting their energies to

> call for exclusive hegemonic voice. This "chorus of differences" now litters our schools, but could be so much more thoughtfully incorporated into the educational life of schooling. We wish to encourage attention to these voices, ever mindful and delighted that they flourish in harmony and in conflict. (p. 6)

Ideology affects both policy and practice. Educators must recognize that policy and practice need to build on and inform each other to ensure that equity is in fact a reality within education. Tong (1996) counsels that policy analysing, advising and consulting need both internal standards of excellence (i.e. the ability to criticize and advance the state of the art) and internal goods (i.e. the satisfaction of knowing that, as the result of one's expertise, the policies that govern one's country are more likely to effect a humane social order) in order to develop into a mature practice. In addition to this, the individual policy analysts must have a conception of themselves as just, courageous and honest people in order to create a worthwhile institutional framework for policy making.

A postmodern feminist critique ultimately leads to "the need to reformulate the methodologies, criteria of validity, and merit and ultimately the political and epistemological commitments underlying the dominant notions or discourse" (Thornton, 1982, p. 53). Through the encouragement of multiple voice and the celebration of diversity and relationships, postmodern feminism allows the stakeholders of education to examine where gender inequities exist, critique current policy and practice, and offer hope for establishing gender equitable policy development and practice within education.

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Appendix A

Policy Potentials for Gender Equitable Practices Within Schools

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (1981) and Rebick and Roach (1996) both outline some potential policy initiatives that would promote more gender equitable practices within schools. An amalgamation of their work leads to the following alternatives to current policy:

1. Maternity leaves: allow women to accumulate seniority while on maternity leave, paying full benefits and salaries. It is unreasonable to penalize women for having children. To say they have a choice in the matter is to suggest that the choice is between fulfilling a biologically determined function and advancing their careers. Men are not confronted with such a choice. In order to eliminate the obvious discrimination that exists, policies should contain clauses that assure women that they will not be penalized for taking maternity leaves;

2. Parental leave/family leave: More emphasis must be placed on men taking responsibility at home and taking care of children. These things need to get integrated into a whole different approach to jobs and family and community, where there is more value placed on home and community life. These policies grant men the opportunity of being more a part of home and family life, and grant females the opportunity to continue in their career;

3. Decreasing steps to maximum: compression of the salary grid. Failure to accumulate seniority while on maternity leave or other interruption of service has resulted in the necessity of a greater number of years in the work force for women to reach the maximum;

4. Benefit plans: Plans should be sought which do not discriminate according to sex or

marital status. Plans should be refused which, for example, might exclude a member from benefits because of complications arising from pregnancy. Rate levels and access to benefits should reflect no bias;

5. Recruitment and hiring: Policies should include clauses inhibiting the employer from asking questions which are not directly related to the position. Hiring practices should be adopted which specifically require that all qualified applicants be interviewed for positions. Those same policies should include a statement that positions will be advertised throughout the system, along with full job descriptions and clear criteria;

6. Part-time teachers: The majority of part-time teachers are women. They need to be offered as much protection in policies as those on a full-time basis. Rates of pay and benefits should be clearly spelled out and assurances written that these people will receive equal treatment. Monetary items should be dealt with on a scale pro-rated against a full-time teacher. Because a part-time teacher may also require a maternity leave, guaranteed mobility in and out of the system should be available;

7. No-discrimination clause: This should be found in all policies. If the clause is present, violations can be dealt with through the grievance process which, even taken all the way to arbitration, is considerably faster and cheaper than the courts. In addition, the clause can act as a "disincentive" to employers;

8. Staff meetings: Timing can cause difficulties with those teachers making use of day care. By dismissing classes 30 minutes early, most staff meetings could conclude within the time teachers would normally leave the school;

9. Day-care: To suggest that school boards should be involved in providing day care services

for employees would be met with, at best, controlled enthusiasm. However, the need is there. Salary levels in teaching are high enough that subsidized day-care is not available. Private centers and baby sitters are expensive, resulting in a monetary penalty to those who are forced to use them. Further, as women assume a more significant place in the workforce, the availability of such services is becoming inadequate. Child care is no longer exclusively a women's issue. The increasing number of single fathers combined with the families where both parents must work have made it an issue that has direct and important implications for men as well as women.

10. Affirmative Action Programs: The enforcement of policy does little towards changing attitudes. Those in positions of authority may agree to consider all qualified applicants for positions, but could well continue with attitudes that designate certain positions as being "male" or "female". In some cases there may even be a backlash. Many women may feel somewhat inadequate considering positions that have not traditionally been available. The formation of Affirmative Action Committees may be a step towards providing a systematic approach to dealing with discrimination;

11. A shorter work week / job sharing: Providing more flexible hours for employment allows both men and women greater flexibility in their personal and work lives.

Appendix B

Questions to ask about any policy proposed to create gender equity could include:

1. How forceful is it?
2. Which feminisms?

Does it:

1. See sexism affecting males too?
2. Assume all women as one unit of analysis?
3. Incorporate ethnicity?
4. Focus on school environment?
5. Recognize schools' interconnectedness with other institutions?
6. Demand constant critical assessment, timelines?
7. Demand monitoring and reporting?
8. Deal with self-esteem?
9. Deal with women's ways of knowing and moral reasoning?
10. Deal with need for relationships, collaboration?
11. Deal with incorporating the private sphere?
12. Focus on only the high achievers?

How all-encompassing is it?

1. What mechanisms for reaching curriculum, program definition, training, finance, governance, buildings and facilities?
2. Does it acknowledge resistance to change and economic and political and historical contexts?
3. Who is the target audience?

4. Who carries the burden of implementation and are they capable?

Note: From "Critical feminist policy analyses: Toward demanding and disrupting policy analyses," by C. Marshall, 1998, p. 9, a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, April 13-17.